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SUBJECT: BENIN: PRESIDENT YAYI'S SECOND CABINET RESHUFFLE

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11. (U) SUMMARY: After months of suspense following the April 2008 legislative elections, President Yayi announced a second cabinet reshuffle on October 22. The cabinet increased from 26 to 30 ministers, nineteen (19) of whom are new to the government. Of the remaining eleven (11), three (3) ministers changed portfolios and fifteen (15) ministers left the government. The titles of some ministries changed; others have been split or combined. New ministries included the Ministry of Maritime Economy, Maritime Transportation and Port Reform, and the Ministry of Petroleum and Mine Research. President Yayi appointed four members of the opposition, two each from G4 and G13 respectively. The two G13 members declined the appointments while those from the MADEP (a component of the G4) joined the cabinet. This is the first in a series of cables on President Yayi's new cabinet. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) To encourage opposition participation in his government, President Yayi appointed two members of the African Movement for Democracy and Progress (MADEP), a component of the G4 group of parties: Charles Kint Aguiar as Minister of Labor and Public Administration, and Francois Abiola as Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research. He also appointed two members of G13, the group of 13 dissident parties formerly in the presidential majority (FCBE). Leon Comlan Ahossi was appointed Minister of the Environment and Nature Conservation and Valentin Aditi Houde Minister of Sports and Leisure. Neither MADEP or G13 appointees attended the hand-over ceremonies on October 23, and both political parties announced that President Yayi had not formally consulted them on the appointments. President Yayi replaced the two G13 candidates with two others who joined the government and attended the first Council of Ministers meeting. President Yayi appointed Victor Topanou, his former legal Advisor and General Secretary of the Government as the new Minister of Justice and Spokesman of the Government.

13. (SBU) The new Ministry of Maritime Economy, Maritime Transportation and Port Reform will be almost exclusively devoted to issues of port administration in order to ensure the success of recently introduced reforms. During a luncheon at the Ambassador's residence on October 23, Eushbe Agbangla, Desk Officer for the Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told her that the creation of this ministry was directly related to recommendations stemming from the September 25 two-year review of the five-year MCA Compact, notably its largest project, the Access to Markets infrastructure program which focuses on the Port of Cotonou. The new Minister, Issa Soule Badarou, is an experienced port manager who directed the port for over a decade in both the Kerekou and the Soglo administrations. The creation of a ministry for Petroleum and Mines Research reflects President Yayi's aim to expand focus on the petroleum sector.

14. (U) Yayi split the Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Small and Medium Scale Enterprises into three: the Ministry of Industry, the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry in Charge of Small and Medium Scale Enterprises and Promotion of the Private Sector. The

President abolished the recently created Ministry of Literacy and National Languages and rolled its literacy component into the Ministry of Culture.

15. (U) The new government includes four women, down from six in the previous government. Reckia Madougou, a social activist and former U.S. "Woman of Courage" nominee, is Minister of Youth, Micro Finance, and Youth and Women's Employment. Some observers criticized this appointment on the grounds that "Civil Society" should not be part of the Executive because of its role as monitor and controller of government action. Bako Mamata Djaouga is the new Minister of Craft Industry and Tourism. Christine Ouinsavi holds the portfolio of Commerce, and Mamatou Marie Joe Meba Bio is the new Minister of Family and Solidarity.

16. (U) This cabinet reshuffle ensures that each of the country's 12 provinces is represented in the government. Yayi appointed two ministers per province. According to Victor Topanou, Government Spokesman and Minister of Justice, the appointments reflect President Yayi's desire to foster national unity. Topanou added that President Yayi seeks to assign more responsibility to ministers and therefore split ministries that combined too many duties to increase efficiency.

17. (U) Initial media and public reaction to the appointments commended the President for having chosen a well-balanced group of technocrats. Some public voices, however, disapproved of the replacement of Seibou Toleba, the former Minister of Culture, Tourism and Craft Industry and the reassignment of Galiou Soglo from the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Leisure to Culture. Trade unionists criticized the government for creating additional expenses while claiming that there is no money to satisfy workers' demands.

18. (SBU) COMMENT: This is the second reshuffle of the Yayi cabinet since he came to power in early 2006 and the first time in the

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political history of the country that ministers declined their appointments. The reshuffle demonstrates his efforts to build broad consensus, although to date the G13 has refused to join. This refusal most likely stems from G13 leaders' dissatisfaction with the assigned portfolios, than from a categorical disinclination to join this government. President Yayi's choices reflect an effort to balance political considerations and technical qualifications. If the new Speaker of the Government is right about President Yayi's intentions to increase ministerial responsibility and delegation, the donor community will welcome this change. Many donor country representatives have criticized President Yayi's management style for a marked absence of delegation of authority, which complicates day-to-day interactions with ministries at the working level. The new General Secretary of the Government and Minister of Justice Victor Topanou is close to the Embassy, and his selection bodes well for implementation of the Women's Justice and Empowerment Initiative (WJEI). END COMMENT.

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